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THE DEGENERATION OF THE TECHNICAL SOCIETIES.

THERE is much current discussion of the present condition of the great technical societies in the United States. The older members seem to be somewhat apprehensive lest the fruits of their great labor and zeal in the earlier days, in the formation, especially, of the national societies of engineers, may be sooner or later wholly lost. The discussions at recent conventions of the Society of Civil Engineers, the most venerable of them all, and the criticisms of our exchanges among the technical journals most interested in its work, lead us to suppose that there is a question whether it does not require some such agitation and revolutionary reconstruction as brought it out of its stupor and threatened decadence fifteen years or more ago, to prevent its utter evanescence now. It is said by the agitators, that the number and quality of its papers, and its influence and growth as a national association, are falling off constantly; that local societies are absorbing those who should enter it, and who should form its material of the coming generation, so generally, that it must apparently, unless this retrograde movement be promptly checked, soon lose its old pre-eminence. It is said by the critics that it no longer holds interesting sessions at its central office; nor does it get together, except by robbing its regular meetings, either much or valuable material for its annual conventions. It is said that a few of the older members only, "run" the society; and that the great men of the profession, and the promising young men, do

not come in as they should, either submitting papers or taking part in the discussions.

Of the Mining Engineers' Society we hear little of such criticism. But it is sometimes suggested that it is by no means a representative or a professional association; that it includes whoever chooses to join; and that those who thus choose are largely non-professionals, or, at least, that the semi-professionals form a large proportion of its body of members, as well as associates. The criticism made of its publications is, that they often include the purely mercantile rather than the professional and scientific element, and that shop and advertisement are too often mixed with the more instructive and original papers.

Of the mechanical engineers we note the observation, by its special constituency among the journals, that while its growth seems to be healthy and steady, its finances well managed, and its conventions well attended, the reader of its "Transactions" misses the names and the papers of a number of the able men who were in its earlier days regular contributors; while the tone of the discussions has deteriorated, and courtesy and good breeding are sometimes forgotten by too youthful or too earnest disputants.

Of the electrical engineers are said, so far as we have observed, only words of praise; though the remark is made that its membership seems to be drawn from among the electricians rather than from the engineers of the great body of electrical engineers who are its natural recruits. Many and excellent papers are presented relating to the dynamo and its physics; few relating to the dynamo as a piece of engineering, or to the designing and construction of stations, of engines and boilers fitted to this department of work, or the engineering of the distribution of electrical energy.

We presume that in many respects these criticisms are simply the outcome of that spirit of fault-finding which is rife in all young societies and among the "fresh" members, who are more ambitious and earnest than wise or just; but there may be some reason behind it all, and the questions are often asked, How may these societies be made more truly national? How may they be given a more representative character? How may the distinguished and experienced members of each be brought into view, and induced to work with and for their continued growth and improvement? The formation of committees of each of the societies to confer together, and to seek some way in which all can be brought into closer relations, and of other committees looking to the absorption of local societies as chapters of the national body, give color to the suspicion that there may be some cause of criticism, and some opportunity of improvement.

If we might make a suggestion, it would be about as follows: see that the presiding officer and the members of the boards of management are elected invariably from among the oldest and most distinguished of available candidates, and that Benjamin Franklin's principle — "No American citizen has a right to seek office; but no true American citizen will refuse to accept office, when called by his fellows to take a position of honor and responsibility" — be paraphrased, and adapted to the case; see that the wise, experienced, able, and honest members are encouraged to present the best fruits of their labors; and especially see that they are treated respectfully, and fairly and kindly, in all discussions. See the "Transactions" carefully placed in the great libraries, and that the papers going before any meeting are given in advance to the representatives of the technical press; see, also, with especial care, that these journals have capable and discreet representatives at the conventions and meetings; and insure, if possible, with still greater care, their treatment with all courtesy, otherwise no complaint of discourtesy will hold against them or their principals. Let the presiding officer and the secretary see that the slightest rudeness or discourtesy, the least variation from the rules of good manners and good breeding, is instantly reprimanded, and the offender properly dealt with; making it the